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ABSTRACT

To accommodate the increased number of foreign students as well as to provide for their various levels of English proficiency, Paris Junior College (Paris, Texas) has expanded its English as a second language (ESL) program into intermediate and advanced levels. Although all of the foreign students have received prior instruction in English, most are still so limited in their ability to use English for academic purposes that they cannot meet the requirements of English composition classes. In the college's ESL program, all foreign students are given an English proficiency and placement test to identify those with a need for additional instruction in English before attempting regular English classes. Students placed in the advanced level understand, speak, and write English fairly well, but still experience difficulty with rhetorical logic and organization. The course includes basic concepts of paragraph development such as unity, coherence, thesis statements, and outlines. Students placed in the intermediate level need help in creating basic sentence patterns and manipulating inflectional derivations. They also learn the exceptions to English grammar rules and the significance of context. Traditional remedial English is not the remedy for the linguistic problems of the second language learner. This ESL program helps nonnative speakers gain control of the grammatical, syntactical and semantic elements of English to enable them to be successful in writing compositions. (HTH)

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TEACHING THE NON-NATIVE SPEAKER IN THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

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IN THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

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TEACHING THE NON-NATIVE SPEAKER

IN THE TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

Paris Junior College has been enrolling international students since 1952: however, it was not until the fall of 1971 that six foreign students were placed in a separate English course designed for non-native speakers of English. This new English as a Second Language course signaled an awareness that the particular language needs of the non-native speaker of English are quite different from the needs of a native speaker.

As the foreign student enrollment increased, the college began to change and expand its English program for international students. The sudden increase in the number of foreign students enrolling in a two year institution can be explained by the need for international students to select an institution where they can study other subjects at the same time as they work to improve their English until they are able to achieve the 500 to 550 TOEFL score required of non-native speakers at most four year institutions.

To accommodate the increased number of international students as well as to provide for their various levels of proficiency, the college expanded the ESL program into an intermediate and an advanced level. The expansion and division of the program resulted from a recognition that even though all of the foreign students had received prior instruction in English in their own countries, and even though many of them had received additional specialized instruction in Intensive English Programs after coming to the United States, most of these students were still so limited

in their ability to use English for academic purposes that they could not meet class requirements, especially the requirements of English composition classes.

In the past, college teachers could assume that a foreign student had attained the high level of proficiency in English required for academic purposes before he was allowed to come to the United States to study. Today, however, many foreign students seek admission before they have acquired sufficient skills in academic English. Despite years of instruction in English in their own countries, attendance at Intensive English Programs in the United States and a fair oral vocabulary, many of these students have not acquired the kind of vocabulary and the level of fluency necessary for college level academic writing. Also, these students are usually weak in the rhetorical foundation necessary for writing complete answers to essay questions and for organizing and writing compositions and research papers.

Although the capabilities of foreign students vary greatly, it is safe to say that because of a generally low level of language proficiency, most of the foreign students who enroll in two-year colleges today are not likely to perform well in their academic pursuits until they receive additional, relevant instruction directed to their specific linguistic deficiencies. A non-native speaker of English simply cannot perform successfully in reading and writing at the college level in English when he is really only semi-literate in academic English and does not really control oral English very well. In fact, some students' control of oral English is so limited that they understand very little of what is taught or even very little

of what is said in classroom lectures and verbal instructions.

Also, although the foreign students can read in English at various levels of proficiency, technically speaking, most of them are so limited in vocabulary and so unfamiliar with the grammatical and syntactical patterns of English that they are forced to read very slowly. In fact, their levels of comprehension are so low that it takes most foreign students twice as long to read assignments as it takes native speakers. In addition, most foreign students have had so little opportunity to practice spoken English that they are hesitant or reluctant to express themselves in class. There are several reasons for this reluctance to speak or to recite. Sometimes it is a result of the student having come from a culture which does not use either interpretive analysis or the Socratic technique in its educational system. Sometimes it is the result of what Earl Stevick has labeled "lathophobic aphasia" or the unwillingness to speak for fear of making a mistake.

But even more important, the students often lack sufficient familiarity with, and practice in the use of written English, the mode of expression so vital for academic achievement in the American college system. Consequently, the English department recognized that until foreign students were able to improve their ability to write accurately, clearly and fluently in formal, college level English, they would be forced to perform inadequately in most of their academic work, especially in English, and that they would have little chance of competing successfully with their English speaking classmates. Although in admitting international students to our schools we are providing them with equal access to academic opportunity, unless we provide them with additional

English classes adapted to their special problems as non-native speakers, we have really provided them with only a general admission ticket to a rigged game.

For these reasons the English department developed a program in which all entering foreign students for whom English is not the native language are given an English Proficiency and Placement Test in order to identify those who demonstrate a need for preliminary, additional instruction in English as a Second Language before they attempt regular English classes. If there are students who achieve a 90-100 score and thus demonstrate a level of achievement sufficient to meet the language skill for writing compositions, these students are placed directly in regular English classes. Other non-native speakers, as determined by their performance on the test, are placed in either the Intermediate or the Advanced level ESL courses. For instance, a student who scores 70-89 indicates an ability to construct simple sentences which are essentially correct but which still have some semantic obscurity because of incorrect word formation or because of a lack of coordinating and subordinating devices. Accordingly, this student is placed in the advanced level ESL course where emphasis is placed on the rhetorical organization of the message the student wishes to convey.

The student placed in the advanced level can best be described as one who understands, speaks and writes English fairly well, but who still experiences great difficulty with the processes of composition, especially compositions which require the rhetorical

skills of logic, analysis and organization. To meet this need, the content of the advanced course includes basic concepts of paragraph development such as unity, coherence, topic sentences, thesis statements and outlines.

All of these elements are, of course, essential parts of English rhetoric. But these elements which are so familiar and so necessary to the rhetoric of English are not always considered to be so essential to logical exposition in other languages. Thus, these elements of English rhetoric which differ greatly from rhetorical logic in other languages and cultures must be carefully taught. In the advanced ESL class, in addition to a general introduction to English rhetorical conventions, emphasis is placed on those grammatical and syntactical areas of English which present the greatest difficulty to non-native speakers. These conventions include such techniques as: subordinating ideas, connecting ideas through transition and the embedding of clauses, the reduction of relative clauses, the creation of parallel grammatical and syntactical structures, and the manipulation of modifying units. Emphasis is also given to such grammatical units as verbals, modals, prepositions and articles. These grammatical elements which have special semantic and syntactic restraints are difficult for the student to learn and for the teacher to teach, but they are essential for becoming fluent in written academic English.

A student who scores 69 or below indicates a need for work in creating basic sentence patterns and in manipulating inflectional

derivations before he attempts to create coherent, logical paragraphs. This student is placed in the intermediate course.

Although a foreign student has usually acquired a considerable knowledge of the rules of English grammar, his written work often reflects his inability to use this knowledge in writing compositions without making an excessive number of errors. There are several reasons for the particular kinds of errors which a foreign student makes in writing. Sometimes the errors are a result of the student's attempt to translate from his native language to English. Although there may be a general one-to-one meaning between certain words in two specific languages, these words are seldom used in both languages in similar grammatical and syntactical patterns. Also, few words in English have fixed, absolute meanings; instead, most words in English depend on context or connotation for meaning. Hence, the particular kinds of errors which a non-native speaker makes often suggest that he is still thinking in his first language and trying to translate into English instead of thinking only in English. Or, the student may inadvertently impose the grammar rules of his first language onto English vocabulary. In either case, the interference from the native language creates an imperfect blending of two languages which can be identified as a direct result of the first language interference and must be treated as such in order to be corrected. To summarize, there is a very distinct difference between the errors made by persons learning English as an additional language and the errors made by native speakers of English. Traditional

remedial English for native speakers is not the remedy for the linguistic problems of the second language learner.

Other special problems for non-native speakers can, however, be attributed to the irregularities or exceptions in the grammar of English. In these cases the non-native speaker makes errors for the simple reason that he has not had enough practice using English to have internalized all of the many exceptions to the rules of grammar which he has so laboriously memorized. This problem of over-generalization in the application of the rules is not caused by the student's first language but by English itself. There are even some teacher induced errors: errors caused by the teacher's failure to make sure that the student learns all of the semantic restrictions of the grammatical and syntactical patterns of particular words.

In any case, the non-native speaker's specific problems in English must be correctly identified to be corrected. For the student whose first language uses an alphabet and writing system similar to English, there is a certain amount of helpful transfer between languages. But for those students whose first language not only has a very different grammatical system but a very different alphabet or syllabary and writing system as well, there are many more elements in writing than in speech which make him vulnerable to errors. Writing compositions becomes a sort of "Catch 22" for these students. They are forced to communicate their ideas and the things they have learned in a new language with a very different writing system before they have mastered either the oral

or written forms of the language. In their attempt to avoid errors, they reduce the amount they write. Unfortunately, these unrelated [illegible]mer type sentences are no more acceptable than their error-filled more complex sentences. For non-native speakers, mastery of written English commensurate with college level English is a frustrating exercise in what the Mock Turtle called "Reeling and Writhing."

To help the enrolling foreign student see that he needs extra instruction before he attempts regular English, Paris Junior College places great emphasis on correct assessment of the student's proficiency in writing. Traditional objective tests of grammar are valuable in providing information about a student's ability to choose the correct form from among several closely related items; however, this type of test requires only recall of a grammatical rule in response to a certain stimuli. This type of test does not provide enough information about the student's ability to use this information because such a test does not force a student to generate sentences which use English as a vehicle to transmit information or ideas. There is no way to be sure that a student has mastered certain grammatical structures until he produces these structures in transmitting information.

The placement test, through questions about short reading selections, elicits certain grammatical structures, yet leaves the student free to provide his own understanding of the material by generating his own grammatical structures to complete the sentence. Using questions related to reading selections also

illustrates a student's skill in deriving information from reading selections; his answers illustrate his ability to select key phrases which he can incorporate in summarizing or in answering questions which require a different linguistic framework. Such test questions also reflect a student's ability to vary language in accordance with changes in tense, person and number.

Correct placement of a student in either the intermediate or the advanced level provides him with the opportunity to acquire the necessary ability to manipulate grammar and syntax in order to produce sentences which correctly communicate his own ideas on a subject. By the end of the intermediate course, a non-native speaker should be able to create understandable and generally correct sentences. But before he can create college level compositions and intelligible answers to essay questions, he still needs to learn new ways of organizing and expressing his thoughts for purposes of connected discourse.

Because of the great concern in written English for the relationship between grammatical form and semantic meaning, and because logic as used for rhetorical purposes is not a universally accepted and practiced way of thinking, the non-native speaker needs a great deal of instruction in manipulating the elements of English used for concepts of time, space, comparison and contrast, cause and effect and cause and consequence. Most foreign students have received little instruction in these elements, either in their home countries or in Intensive English Programs, because these structures are not used as frequently in conversation

as in writing. Students may be unfamiliar with these concepts and techniques if the teaching methods used in their countries do not stress analytical classification and ordering. Also, because of cultural differences, students educated in non-English speaking educational systems sometimes find it difficult to get to the point quickly or to support opinions with what we in the Western world call facts.

Foreign students must also learn the processes of editing and revising. Of course, any good writer has to learn to rephrase and rearrange his sentences to achieve coherence, clarity and conciseness. But since these revisions require sophisticated techniques of embedding and reducing clauses or coordinating and subordinating clauses, this manipulation of grammar and syntax for improved semantic effect becomes for the non-native speaker a very complex task. However, if the foreign student is ever to move beyond the creation of short, unrelated sentences, he must be given intensive instruction and extensive practice in these techniques. For this reason, the emphasis in the advanced level is on the rhetorical and syntactical manipulation of grammar and punctuation necessary to create logically organized paragraphs and essays.

At Paris Junior College, the preparatory English as a Second Language courses have been beneficial to foreign students in that these classes have provided non-native speakers of English an opportunity to gain enough control of the grammatical, syntactical, semantic and graphic elements of English to enable them to be successful in writing compositions. These classes also benefit

the teachers of regular English classes as they struggle to find fair, humane ways of teaching and evaluating foreign students. Most English teachers realize that it is unreasonable to expect a foreign student to write a whole composition in correct Standard English when he is barely able to construct a simple, intelligible oral sentence. In addition, with the current large enrollment, teachers of regular English classes simply do not have the time to provide a foreign student with all of the help he must have to write compositions in English. But even if they did have the time necessary to spend with individual foreign students, many teachers of regular English classes are completely baffled about how to deal with the remarkable versions of English which foreign students often create. Most teachers of English have had little academic preparation for teaching persons who are not native speakers of English.

Thus, the admission of large numbers of non-native speakers of English has created a real crisis in English classes in two-year colleges It is a crisis that cannot be ignored. And, since the enrollment of international students in two-year institutions is predicted to increase significantly in the future, there is a real need for preliminary ESL instruction for non-native speakers before they are enrolled in regular English classes. If two-year institutions continue to admit students whose present command of English is so limited that they cannot benefit from conventional monolingual instruction, the institutions should provide them with the linguistic resources which will enable them to compete with success.

These additional, preliminary English as a Second Language classes benefit foreign students in other academic endeavors as well, for no matter how intelligent a foreign student may be, his chance for success in an American college will greatly depend on his ability to use English, especially in the written form. It is axiomatic that the extent and rate of a foreign student's ability to learn any academic subject will be increased in proportion to his ability to understand and use the written form of the language used in the instructional process.

Conversely, if a foreign student is not provided with assistance which is relevant to his language problems, and he is instead given a passing grade because of a teacher's sympathy or inability to help him, the student may be led to believe that he has acquired enough skill in English to succeed in other academic areas which require equally high linguistic skills. Also, if a student is not given a realistic appraisal of his deficiencies and is not given relevant assistance, he usually develops a chronic pattern of attempting and dropping classes while he shops about for a sympathetic instructor who will accept and pass his unsatisfactory work. In addition to pedagogical headaches, all of this changing of classes causes an excessive number of administrative problems as well.

Although English as a Second Language courses have helped foreign students to achieve in regular English compositon courses, there is also a need for a special ESL course to assist non-native speakers in the study of literature. This course could be designed

to minimize the demands on the foreign student's limited understanding of the cultural patterns of English speaking countries. A teacher of such a course could prepare students for reading literary works by providing them with vocabulary lists, with lists of idiomatic constructions and with explanations for historical, biblical and literary allusions. When necessary, teachers could also provide students with brief explanations of cultural and ethical concepts commonly accepted in the Western world but which may not be known or accepted in other cultures. There seems to be little justification in requiring foreign students to read and to be tested on the salient literary works of Western civilization and English speaking culture if we do not provide them with the linguistic and cultural information necessary for them to understand and to appreciate the literary works.

The task of the foreign student studying and performing academically in English is much greater than merely learning a second language as an academic subject of cultural interest. It is even a much greater task than becoming bilingual in English and his native language. Foreign students studying in American colleges are emeshed in the process of becoming bi-literate in formal academic English and, to a certain extent in the study of literature, becoming academically bi-cultural as well. For academic success in these complex processes, most non-native speakers will require additional, relevant ESL classes which build upon their previous, mostly oral instruction in English. The typical internation student enrolling in two-year colleges in the U.S. today needs specific preparation in English as a Second Language to meet the requirements for study of college level subjects in English.